

Green jobs touted to fuel economic recovery

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When Fred Noble finds someone to fix his many windmills at the entrance to Palm Springs, it doesn't take long for companies from Norway or Texas to hire them away.

Windmill technicians, a \$15- to \$20-an-hour job, are in high demand worldwide, said Noble, the owner of Wintec Energy.

Experts point to a growing class of "green-collar" jobs that could help sustain both the economy and environment at a time when the nation's unemployment rate has hit a five-year high and 8.9 percent of the Inland region's workers are out of work.

With a \$100 billion investment in projects that encourage environmental living, the country could create 2 million jobs in two years, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council. California's share, based on the gross domestic product, would be \$12.7 million and 235,198 jobs, the study says.

The nonpartisan group commissioned the study conducted by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to focus on six areas government funding could spur growth: solar energy, wind turbines, retrofitting buildings, improving electricity grids, developing biofuels and building mass transit options.

For Woodrow Clark II, a UC Riverside lecturer and advisor to the Inland environmental economic development group dubbed Green Valley Initiative, the idea isn't new but timing is ripe.

While the economy, especially in the Inland region, treads water as the housing market continues to sink and more homeowners fall into foreclosure, local and federal governments are seeking green fixes for buildings, roads and energy sources.

As a finance advisor to California's Gov. Gray Davis, Clark wrote a paper titled "California's Next Economy" before the governor was recalled in 2003, looking at sustainable green development as the key to the state's viability.

"There's going to be a long future in it," Clark said of green jobs.

In Los Angeles, the school district will have \$7.3 billion in bond funds to build green buildings, Clark said.

The return on investment in building green can still take six years in a best-case scenario, but usually takes longer. That's too long, Clark said.

"What we have to do is train more people," he said.

As more workers get trained in technical positions for environmental construction and electrical engineering, labor costs will go down.

Local opportunities for training though are scarce.

Clark and others point to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers that is assisting its employees. Inland community colleges have applied for \$1 million in grants to start training programs as well. College of the Desert has a nascent solar installation program and UC Riverside has a certificate program in sustainable development.

In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, 10 building projects have been certified for complying with LEED standards -- leadership in energy and environmental design -- including the Arrowhead bottling plant in Cabazon and a Metropolitan Water District center in Hemet. Another 73 projects in the two counties are seeking LEED certification, said Bonnie Montoya-May, chair of the U.S. Green Building Council's Inland chapter.

The Meridian Business Park being developed by LNR Property Corp. on former March Air Force Base land is one of six finalists for the national Green Development Award from the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties. LNR has used the concrete from older roads and buildings it demolished and recycled it into four miles of new road, according to a statement from the company.

But experts say government investments in green building, not a subsidy or handout, will eventually drive the movement to become the norm not the exception for businesses able to afford the environmental alternatives.

"I think there's a lot of market momentum, but a lot of these industries, when they're new, don't expand as quickly when there aren't incentives," said Daniel Cozad, director of the Green Valley Initiative. "The smartest folks are looking at their long-term costs," he said.

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